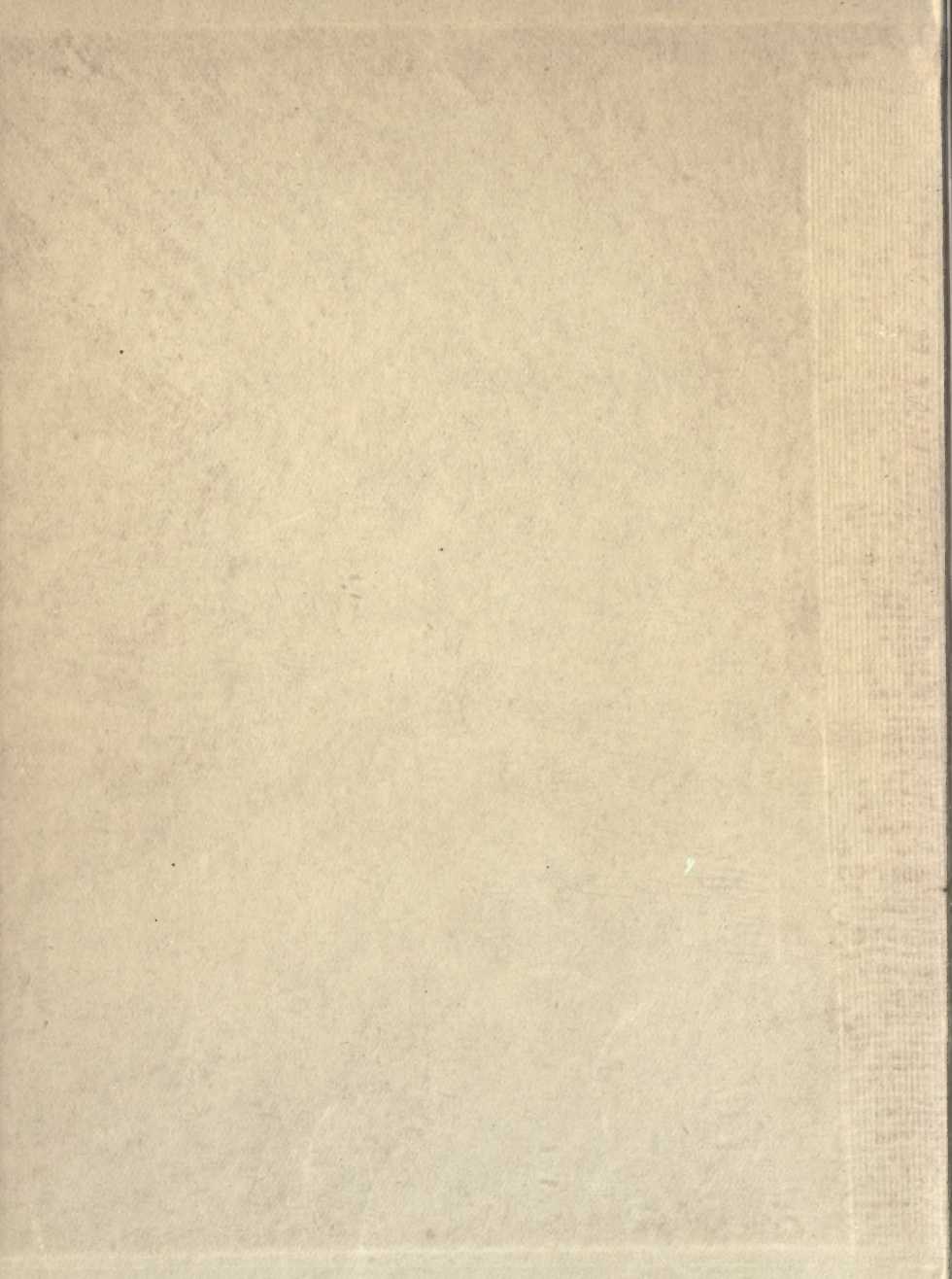


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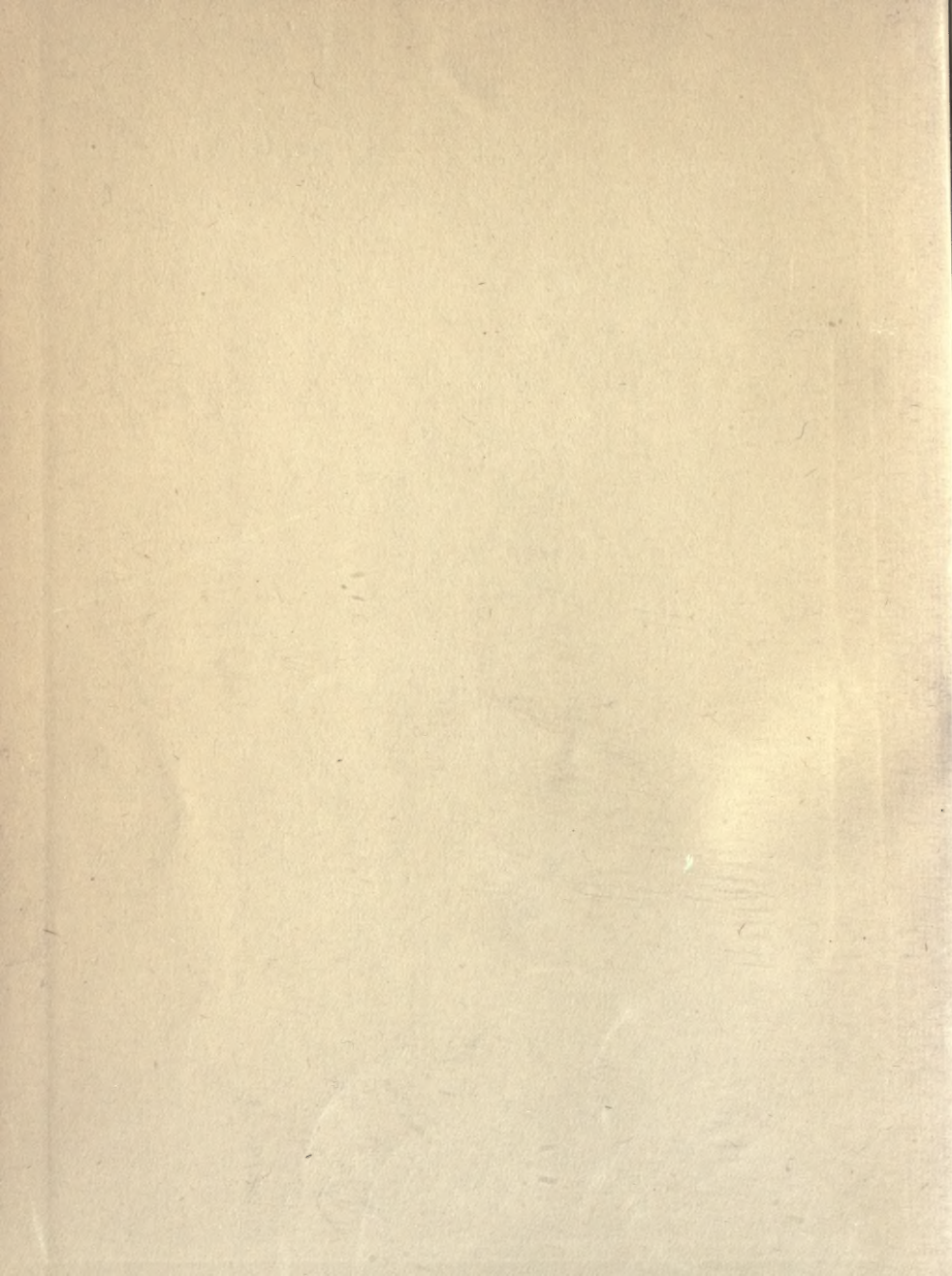
VOYAGE OF ASS

E. H. W. MEYERSTEIN

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VOYAGE OF ASS

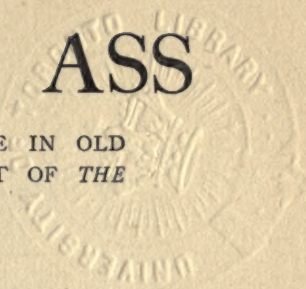
BY THE SAME AUTHOR

## WADE'S BOAT

“Mr. Meyerstein can play many a different tune on this form, from the sweet to the rough. And the minstrels sing one or two delightful songs; and the preliminary verses show a power of moving graciously among old schemes of word music. About the whole book there is a something at once original and scholarly, ‘human’ and fantastic, which makes it well worth attention.”—*The Times*.

161307

# VOYAGE OF ASS



A TALE OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE IN OLD  
LONDON, THE STANZA BEING THAT OF *THE*  
*CHERRIE AND THE SLAE*

BY E. H. W. MEYERSTEIN

AUTHOR OF "WADE'S BOAT"

178115.  
16.2.23.

LONDON  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1922



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## VOYAGE OF ASS

Ass rose up in his father's house ;  
" Lo, how I skulk here as a mouse,  
    Eternally in vain !  
Xerxes was but a man like me ;  
My fancies lie across the sea,  
    On Ireland or on Spain.  
Now is the time to climb to crowns,  
    To wield a whanging bow ;  
Great idleness or great renown's  
    Offered to high and low.  
    Mere leisure's no pleasure,  
Except for grey-haired knaves ;  
    Right voyage suits coy age,  
Youth beats the bravest staves.

" What is the tongue ? A scourge of air ;  
What is the air ? Of life the care ;  
    And what is life ? Man's will.  
Cannot I fashion thought on thought,  
A house as fair as my sire wrought  
    On sky-surrounded hill ?

## VOYAGE OF ASS

Cannot I laugh a merry laugh  
At jests of other men ?  
Cannot I from a beaker quaff  
Round as an alewife's wen ?  
Ale's nappy ; who's happy,  
But when the loud laughs foam ?  
This rafter quells laughter,  
Abroad I'll seek my home.

“ The folk that brought me upon earth  
Have given me trencher, brain, and mirth,  
And jolly legs withal.  
These legs are stiff with laziness,  
Besieging griefs this brain obsess,  
The trencher's mounds appal.  
Now I must win meat for myself,  
And mirth shall aid me to't ;  
These arms are limber as an elf,  
And goodly-thewed to boot.  
My features are creatures  
Obedient to command,  
My manners are banners  
That take a stranger land.

“ Ass am I called, for ass I seem,  
Stubborn and slow, not prone to dream,  
Which is man's property.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

If ever I bore other name,  
I have no knowledge of the same,  
    Nor would be glad thereby.  
A word is but a word with me,  
    False differs least from true ;  
Safe is the fruit of the oak tree,  
    But venomous the yew.  
    So tearful and fearful  
Are younker and his lass,  
    That Edom of freedom  
'Longeth to loveless Ass.

“ Though on two feet I go, not four,  
I understand the four-foot lore,  
    And count it to my good.  
From ox I learn the signs of rain,  
And how the tempests rise and wane  
    From foxes in the wood ;  
For they will bark as any cur  
    When dropsied vapours swell,  
And mastiffs by their bellies' burr  
    Downpouring floods foretell.  
    Hog playing, ass braying,  
Cat washing much her face,  
    Calf rushing, goat pushing  
Bespeak the thunder's pace.

“ I share the secrets of the birds,  
Interpreting their liquid words

## VOYAGE OF ASS

According as they flit.  
Freshwater gulls and cormorants,  
Bearing to land like immigrants,  
Vouchsafe me of their wit :  
Then farmer folk should keep indoor,  
Having got in the hay ;  
But when they flock high o'er a moor  
Seaward, 'twill be fair day.  
Dull robins bring sobbings  
Of drops where late we ploughed,  
Loud bitterns sweet citterns  
Of breeze and bluest cloud.

“ The paternoster of the worm  
Is tedious and very firm,  
O Lord, in hosts we crawl  
From earth when we expect Thy showers ;  
The spiders tumbling from their bowers  
Approaching gusts recall.  
The westward hasting ants, and Mars  
Aslope toward our farm,  
Are more secure than calendars,  
If we are doomed to harm.  
Float spiders, betiders  
Are they on grass or tree  
Of fairness and rareness  
Of air and sunny glee.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“ Last night clear specks were on the moon,  
And sharp her horns as ladies' shoon,  
    To-day will be no wrack.  
Yet I my sowskin cloak will take  
And blanket, lest my long legs ache,  
    Wrapped in a pedlar's pack.  
For grass is vile to lie upon  
    After a bath of rain,  
And ledges of the hottest stone  
    Prick a young back with pain :  
        But ledged ground and sedged ground  
Are places very meet  
    To please one and ease one  
With soiled and weary feet.

“ I will not tell folk that I go ;  
When I am gone they needs must know,  
    For that I am not here.  
And one will run with wondrous tale  
How he spied Ass in yonder dale  
    Dowsing with hazel spear ;  
And one, ' He went to lift a cow  
    After his father's mind ; '  
And one, ' He drives a yeoman's plough,  
    Leaving ill wage behind.'  
        With slandering and mandering  
And ever deep heart-burn,  
    And vast time at pastime  
They'll bide till I return.”

## VOYAGE OF ASS

Father and mother turned on their straw,  
When Ass walked in the valley shaw  
    The feathered monks to greet ;  
The pretty goldfinch and his hen,  
The titmouse and the jennywren,  
    They sing and hop so sweet.  
All their commandments are *Thou shalt*,  
    Since they are free from spot ;  
The God of kind Whom they exalt  
    Hath little need of *not*.  
    Their alms-deeds are psalms-deeds  
Unendingly upflung,  
    Their parvis the service  
They yield unto their young.

The spurge outsprang whereas he went,  
And early windflowers without scent  
    Environed his way ;  
But he held still unswerving line,  
Although the spiny eglantine  
    Took seisin with its spray :  
And where the green growth thickest was,  
    And the birds' lay most full,  
Upon a narrow aisle of grass  
    A fleece of last year's wool  
    Lay gleaming and streaming  
With diamonds of dew,  
    That no man but woman  
Might doubt that it was new.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

(For woman is least credulous,  
Saving if she be amorous,  
Of any living wight.)  
And Ass, beholding fortune's gift,  
Albeit mean, with face uplift  
Exclaimed in clear delight,  
" This is the fleece the fairies bring  
To them that on May-day  
Go forth to hear the small fowls sing  
And throw the world away :  
Since heaven is given,  
As I heard wise man tell,  
To cow-boy and plough-boy,  
Who can nor read nor spell."

He wiped it every side of wet,  
And shrewdly in his bundle set,  
Fording the shallow stream ;  
And from the margin of the shaw  
A necklace of fair towers he saw,  
Shot with the steady beam,  
Augusta upon Tamesis built  
By force of Roman hand,  
Where of Britons much blood was spilt,  
The richest gem o' the land  
In lading and trading  
Of ships across the sea,  
For duty and beauty  
Extolled famously.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

Ass laughed, " I have watched thee before,  
That art more lovely than thy store,  
    But never in such rays.  
Though starven to the pit in thee,  
My everlasting heart goes free  
    As are thy virelays.  
For who would lose a finer thing  
    Than king or pope bestows,  
By fear of man's outrageous sting ?  
    The thorn still guards the rose.  
    O city sans pity,  
I love thee 'yond my peers ;  
    Stern physic sends music  
    Into an ass's ears.

" Thy noise is three leagues from my peace ;  
I bear unto thy mart a fleece,  
    Which shall be bought at noon.  
Though I be foiled of half the price,  
I will abide by his advice  
    Who tenders me that boon.  
A buyer's rede is not the worst  
    For redeless folk to hark,  
And he that hath a parlous thirst  
    Drinks puddles in the dark.  
    Though froward, no coward  
Am I, by yon glad sun ;  
    Let pennies help zanies,  
The fearless ever won."



## VOYAGE OF ASS

But now the toilers in the fields  
Began their matin chant that yields  
    Refreshment to each hand,  
Beseeching Him who sits in bliss  
To shed His mercy and His kiss  
    Upon the rough-lipped land.  
Ass heard them without mickle heed,  
    So brimmed his mind with joy ;  
For all the world was then his need,  
    As is the wont of boy,  
    Who, straining and draining  
His store of hellish pride,  
    Takes tome-lore for home-lore  
And all the world beside.

The road lay worn with rut and bare  
Along the plain toward the hair-  
    White girdle of that Zion :  
On either edge a flaggy ditch  
Of water-vole and frog rolled rich,  
    Blown o'er with dandelion  
Frequently on a windy hour ;  
    The hedge grew lank and mean,  
For warmth had grudged renewing power  
    To the thin pale of green.  
    The morning, adorning  
Each height, gleamed not at full ;  
    No gay wheel or dray-wheel  
Varied the limit dull.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

He scarce had reached the fourth milestone,  
When from one side he heard a groan  
    With chattering of teeth ;  
And ere his prentice eye peered down,  
Arose a face without a frown,  
    But lean as a sword's sheath.  
The body that belonged thereto  
    Was cased in rugged hide,  
And the left foot had lost its shoe,  
    So feebly steered aside.  
    “ Why smart you ? Why dart you  
    So clumsily at me ? ”  
    “ I am, Sir, a lamb, Sir,  
    Of Goddes own countree.

“ Yon glorious burgh I also seek,  
But very lame and very weak  
    I laid me down yestreen  
Against that stone to rest my head,  
But rogues have me so buffeted ;  
    Behold my fearful teen !  
They stole the shoe from off my foot,  
    Money therein to find.  
The truth I speak, and add this to 't  
    That one of them was blind ;  
    His name is Infamis,  
My mother told me so,  
    The robbers, his jobbers,  
They call him Cupido.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“ O, ditch water is cold and stinks,  
This eye is clogged with mire and winks,  
    Prithee, Sir, pity me.  
Something I know of merchant ways,  
In Bristow have I passed my days,  
    And I can succour thee.  
If thou hast aught with thee to sell  
    In great Londinium,  
We'll to the sound of Powles bell  
    Like good companions come,  
        Where Bargain and Margain  
Are masters over all.  
    Not dry, Sir, your eye, Sir ?  
I'm thine, whate'er befall.”

Ass heard his oaths and smoothed his clothes,  
Acknowledging that mankind loathes  
    Discourtesy in youth ;  
And searching as a faithful hound,  
The stranger's other shoe he found,  
    For to attest his truth,  
Close by a nettle. So they went,  
    Debating pleasantly  
Of robbers and their punishment  
    Under a glitterand sky,  
    So fairly, so squarely,  
No Christian would have weened  
    The wan to be a man to be,  
The rubicund a fiend.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

For as the city gate waxed clear,  
Ass's face took a ghastly cheer  
    Like an old man's in bed,  
And ill his step the way bestrode ;  
It was not such a weary road  
    For springing lustihead.  
But he that walked one side of him  
    Prattled as any pie ;  
He plumped his cheek as cherubim  
    On minster roof so high.  
    " What ails thee, what stales thee,  
    My merry-hearted friend ? "  
    " Ah, would now I stood now  
    At this brief journey's end ! "

" Anon thou shalt. See the gate,  
Admitting folk of each estate  
    Their wares to bring and fetch,  
And, hanging well in front of it,  
If these thick eyes have any wit,  
    Body of guilty wretch ! "  
(Now in this New Jerusalem  
    That men Augusta call  
Their enemy makes game of them,  
    But God protecteth all.)  
    Ass hearkened and darkened,  
Knowing he was of sin,  
    Nor said aught, nor prayed aught ;  
And so they entered in.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

Behind the gate a chapel was  
Reared up in stone and precious glass

    With champions hewn above,  
Which Ass observing curiously,  
Made question of one standing by  
    How great the cost thereof.

The other said he knew not that,  
    But he should pray there soon,  
For preachment by the mayor's *fiat*  
    Would holden be at noon.

    " Much cunning and running  
For sitting places than ;  
    Take time now and climb now  
The broad stair while ye can."

But the foul fiend that tempts astray  
Was not disposed to lose his prey  
    So early as the noon,  
And turning to the citizen,  
" Thou hast," quoth he, " small skill in men,  
    Who thinkest him a loon.

The preachment sure is very good  
    Which folk will flock to hear,  
And of the learned understood,  
    As doubtless shall appear,  
    Hast loved not or proved not  
The simple clerkly song,  
    That's olden, yet golden,  
And truer than 'tis long ?

VOYAGE OF ASS

“ ‘ The world is full of countless fools,  
Consorting unto countless schools  
Of Aristotle and Plato,  
*Qui bombinant in vacuo.*

“ ‘ If you would find one truly wise,  
Use not your wits but use your eyes,  
Yet unto parsons spare to go,  
*Qui bombinant in vacuo.*

“ ‘ Moneta is the wise man’s god,  
She rules him with a golden rod ;  
They named her Here and ‘Juno,  
*Qui bombinant in vacuo.’ ”*

But Ass, soon as this catch was sung,  
Perceived that his desire was young,  
And called unto the fiend,  
“ Now hast thou taught me what I am,  
A river that will brook no dam,  
A king that must be queened.  
Where are the women of this town ?  
Go fetch them here at once,  
With or without a covering gown ;  
Indeed I am no dunce.  
Apparel, the quarrel  
Betwixt custom and man,  
Bids naked be slaked  
So fast as e’er it can.”

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“ Nay, not so fast ! Thou hast no gold,  
And love is justly bought and sold

Like each commodity.”

“ Lead me where I may sell my fleece ;  
Desire is only set at peace,

Having wherewith to buy.”

So saying, he stript him of his pack,  
And drew the fleece therefrom.

The fiend smiled piteously, “ Alack,  
This is not worth a comb ;

’Tis ragged and sagged,

And fit for nothing good.

Who owned it ? ” “ I found it,”  
Said Ass, “ in the greenwood.”

“ Make not thyself a laughing-stock ;

Thou hast a key that shall unlock

The aumbries of rich men.

Thou art so tall and debonair,

Each good wife maketh thee her prayer,

According to my ken.

Let them but see thee stand astride,

Going to hear God’s news,

They’ll send for thee in the undertide,

And thou may’st pick and choose.

Mouth’s honey and money

Into thy poke shall roll :

Look haughty and naughty,

As if thou hadst some soul.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“ But we want food ; the crusts of bread  
We begged on road can scarce bestead  
    Against the belly’s pangs.  
Though I to hunger am inured,  
Of wholesome diet thou art not cured ;  
    Take something in thy fangs.  
Yonder stands an apple-man,  
    His barrow is too full.  
Give him thy fleece, and in his pan  
    He’ll weigh its worth of wool ;  
        For apple and chapel  
And lusty paramour,  
        If knavish, can ravish  
Of womanhood the flower.”

And when for that fair fleece they had  
A score of apples good and bad,  
    A stir was in the place.  
First walked the mayor and aldermen,  
With guardian halberds nine or ten,  
    And one who bore the mace ;  
Then furred judges with their books  
    In an uneven line,  
And next their pantlers, reeves, and cooks,  
    More civil than divine.  
    The rabble with babble  
Pressed like an autumn tide,  
    The drapers their tapers  
Marshalled on t’other side.



## VOYAGE OF ASS

And from the windows juttet out  
Faces too sick to turn about,  
    And eager boys and girls,  
All clamouring confusedly  
Of everything they might espy,  
    Like fledgeless crowded merles.  
And casting artful eye thereon,  
    His comrade cried to Ass,  
" Lo my sweet cousin Alison  
    There with the looking-glass,  
    So neatly and featly  
    Arraying her red hair !  
    I ne knew that she knew  
    The sleight of staying fair."

The loud chimes rang, and Ass looked up  
Into that eye as a kingcup  
    At the soundless dawn.  
The web was woven on that stound,  
And either felt a joyous wound ;  
    The queen had ta'en a pawn.  
But the contriver of the snare  
    Held his regard away,  
And stole his cloven hoof elsewhere ;  
    He had more work that day.

*Augusta venusta,  
Donec in æternum  
    Gaudebis, tenebis  
Vinctum Diabolum.*

## VOYAGE OF ASS

Alison was a mercer's wife,  
A pretty lady, on my life,  
    For any modern youth ;  
She was so delicate and proud,  
And no man near her head allowed,  
    Except he told her truth,  
Namely, he loved no other fair :  
    She was not jealous, she,  
But in her heart some deal aware  
    Of fickle-hearted glee.  
    Yet ever she'd lever  
    A son and daughter have,  
    Than boasted and toasted  
    Go down unto the grave.

Now having fixed her mind on him  
Who 'mong the press beneath did swim  
    In the first pool of love,  
She scrawled three words, " At evening, thief,"  
With lead upon a handkerchief  
    And dropt it from above,  
Letting him settle his own hour,  
    For apt is woman sly  
Freedom at once on faith to shower  
    And afterward deny.  
    Thus haunted and daunted  
By fires of new surprise,  
    He raised it and praised it,  
Yet dared not trust his eyes :

## VOYAGE OF ASS

But looked around him for his friend,  
And could not reach unto the end  
    Of the raw populace ;  
And venturing his gazing brains  
Up to the far-flung latticed panes,  
    Beheld another face.  
So, little quieted in mind,  
    He veered into a street  
Running athwart that mansion kind,  
    Haply therein to meet  
        A brother or other  
To teach him by what mean  
    He might gain some right gain  
To pour before his queen.

Now there he met a crying boy,  
Who was defrauded of his joy  
    And could not see the mayor,  
Lifting whom lightly on his pack,  
He sought to remedy the lack,  
    And made to him this prayer :  
“ What is the surest trick to win  
    A lovely lady's heart  
In road of honesty not sin,  
    All without fear of smart ? ”  
    Demurring and purring,  
The happy one 'gan say,  
    “ To bite her and fight her  
And go your angry way.”

## VOYAGE OF ASS

At this word, said with smirking pout,  
Vehement laughter shook his doubt :

“ At once it shall be done.”

And beating at the postern door  
With yawning jowl and triple roar  
Cried he, “ Where’s Alison ? ”

And Alison, swayed contrarywise  
By overmastering fear,  
Yet oped to him, and faced his eyes  
With quick repentant cheer.

“ What danger, O stranger,  
Compels you unto me ?  
Come in, friend, and win, friend,  
Our roof’s security.

“ My husband’s gone to Verulam ;  
Most gladsome to assist I am.

Was he that chased you armed ? ”

“ Aye, aye,” quoth he, with growing glee,  
“ At least he seemed so to me.

Shut door ; I am unharmed.”

Whereat the child who stood without  
Set up a howl of mirth.

The door was shut : “ Turn thee about ;  
Upon thy back is earth.

No wound ’tis, quite sound ’tis ;  
Well worth thy knocking here !

Mount up now, we’ll sup now  
Before the stars appear.”

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“ Madam,” he said, “ I earn my bread  
By selling coats of mutttons dead,  
And I have sold my last.  
If your good man and you have work  
That man can do, I shall not shirk ;  
I’m steady, but not fast.”  
“ We’ll speak of that when he comes home,”  
She said, and pointed him  
Into a chamber with high dome,  
Bright as a goblet’s rim,  
Where, sitting and knitting,  
Two lasses soft suspirod  
For dalliance, in valiance  
Of cramoisy attired.

“ Now this is he,” to them quoth she,  
“ Who frighted us with outcries three,  
And drave me down the stair.”  
“ And this is she,” to them quoth he,  
“ Who threw this handkerchief to me,  
And caught my heart by care.  
And I am hers and she is his  
Who wedded her before,  
And I must miss the sweetest kiss  
That ass’s lips yet wore.”  
“ How ass’s ? ” the lasses  
Peal forth in purling breath ;  
“ Who framed me, they named me  
After that beast,” he saith.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“ Put case,” she laughed, “ that he comes not  
From Verulam unto this spot

But as a grisly corse.”

“ Then thou wert mine with pomp and wine,”

He said, “ and these would prance full fine

At our joint hest perforce ;

And the blind harper with his dog

That wonnes by Thames cold

Would strike up strain of Gogmagog

And Corineus bold,

With prating and grating

And barking at one time,

With twangling and jangling

Of wild notes and ill rime.”

“ And Christ forfend that should be so !

Though ye should bid, we'd say you no,”

The lasses shout together.

“ Her husband is our cousin dear,

At whose passing we will shed tear,

And gloom like wintry weather.

We love not that unthinking wife

Who clean forgets her man,

To pack twelve husbands in one life

As grapes in a tun of bran.

True passion to fashion

Is keystone to an arch,

And wedlock no dead lock

Through which all keys can march.”

## VOYAGE OF ASS

Whereat the pair who loved each other  
Laughed, and their laughter could not smother

Until they clasped their sides.

“ Cousins, we give you right ; ye know  
The way in which the world should go,

But we know how it slides.

But, taking truce of gibe absurd,

I bid you, Sir (for Ass

I will not call you), now ungird

Your neck of the rude mass

That bulging, divulging

No whit of its content,

Gives scope for and hope for

More solid merriment.”

He took the poke from off his back,

But from a badly seamed crack

An apple pattered down,

And then a second and a third ;

The lasses by the window stirred

And read his face with frown.

“ See ye,” scoffed Alison, “ how man

Becomes another Eve.

Keep thy vile fruit ; it is our plan

To humour, not deceive.

We love you and move you

To tell us your concern ;

We’ll feast you and rest you

Until your host return.”

## VOYAGE OF ASS

A supper then was nimbly laid,  
And Ass's belly full apaid  
    With delicates and beer ;  
For she a new hogshhead bade broach  
In honour of her lord's approach,  
    She did him so revere.  
And loud and long rolled the guest's tongue,  
    For he could fair describe  
His parents and the bed of dung  
    Where he had grown a kibe,  
        Manuring and curing  
    The earth of aridness,  
        And lopping the topping  
    Trees of their leafy dress.

And she told him of urban sport  
And pleasant whispers of the court,  
    And what the duchess wore  
When she from pregnancy was risen,  
And of the lord condemned to prison  
    For cheating of his whore.  
The lasses cried out, " Fie for shame,"  
    But ate still heartily,  
None too begrudging of that game,  
    Being virtuous to the eye.  
        With fable and table  
    Replenished many times  
        They battled and prattled  
    Unto the midnight chimes.



## VOYAGE OF ASS

And then she strewed a silken couch  
Beneath the dome, which might avouch

    The mercer's pouch of gold ;  
For he had raised its lamped height  
Only for Alison's delight

    And his when they were old.  
But never child played under it  
    Saving the neighbour's son,  
Who had as yet too small a wit  
    To wonder how 'twas done.

    The gilding o' the building  
    Semé with pheons gules  
    And azure embrasure  
    Blazed as ten thousand Yules.

There left she him to sleep and keep  
Remembrance of her sorrow deep,  
    Who loved and was not free.  
No churl he was that yearned for her,  
Whose heart was his ; he could not err  
    In native chastity.

Yet ever through his fancy ran  
    Vision of a face  
On trestles motionless and wan,  
    Hurried to burial place.

    He woke not and broke not  
Stillness until the day  
    Through curtain for certain  
Thrust that foul dream away.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

For standing over him he saw  
A shaven officer of law  
    And at his side the host,  
Who said, "Thou art a rogue, I trow ;  
Thy tale of pilferings avow,  
    Ere thou give up the ghost."  
"It is not so, it is not so !  
    Go ask thy merry dame ;  
She heard my roars for help below,  
    At her advice I came.  
    O grip me and strip me !  
Nought but what's mine I bear,  
    No dagger ; I stagger  
From suddenness, not fear."

Then called the mercer Alison,  
Who told each thing as it was done.  
    " After a drinking bout  
From Verulam by night I came,"  
He said unto that peerless dame ;  
    The officer went out.  
" This fellow wants work to his hand,  
    Or he will thieve indeed,"  
She said ; " And he can understand  
Of sheep's fleeces the rede.  
    Relieve him and give him  
Labour and goodly hire:  
    Dissemblers are tremblers ;  
He's brave, nor dreads the fire."

## VOYAGE OF ASS

But Ass, remembering the word " thief "  
Was written on the handkerchief,  
    Marvelled where that might be.  
It lay among the plates bare,  
His own fingers had left it there  
    In midmost revelry.  
And crushing into a slim ball  
    He took it with delight  
And proffered unto the small  
    Hand of his goddess white.  
    Which kerchief was her chief  
    Trouble until that hour ;  
    Low louting, all doubting  
    He put beyond her power.

" Thou hast a courtly manner, friend,  
And shouldst not come to evil end,"  
    The cunning mercer laughed.  
" This very day a fleet parts hence  
For Norroway on trade's pretence,  
    Not without armed craft.  
The port-reeve will deny thee not  
    Access, if such thy pleasure ;  
A sailor's mind is full of plot,  
    And thou may'st find a treasure :  
    Retailing and sailing  
In seas with mountains cold,  
    Thou strikest, an thou likest,  
The ancient fleece of gold.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“ Out of my house, thou silly loon ;  
Thou hast of us too large a boon  
    Already, by my troth.  
Go dig a dyke, drive a plough,  
Thou shalt get paramours enow ;  
    There’s many a cure for sloth.”  
With that he shoved him through the door,  
    And would have cast him down,  
But, slipping on the rushy floor,  
    Fell back and split his crown.  
    “ Be merry, my cherry ! ”  
Cried Ass from the threshold ;  
    “ I love thee above me ;  
    We’re one when he’s in mould.”

Woe worth the cause of lovers rich,  
For they will tumble in the pitch  
    That waits unwary wealth !  
Woe worth the cause of lovers poor  
That weep their wits out on the moor,  
    And draw the moon by stealth !  
Woe worth the cause of woman sought,  
    Perplexed beyond attorn !  
Woe worth the cause of woman fraught  
    With gift that suitors spurn !  
    Woe worth the true earthy  
Cause of nature blind,  
    Whose plain pleas are vain pleas  
Not after the world’s mind !

## VOYAGE OF ASS

For Ass, supposing that the stars  
Intend to break his heart in spars

    With fortune retrograde,  
Betakes himself unto the river,  
His pokeless body to deliver  
    Unto the gods of trade.

Lo on the mud a sea-captain<sup>!</sup>  
    With a rope in his hand,  
Tied to a half-filled sack of grain,  
    Which he has brought to land  
    With many, scarce any  
Profit to take therefrom !  
    “ A helper, no yelper  
I need ; is thy name Tom ? ”

“ Aye, aye,” saith Ass, who cares no doit  
For riches under giants' coit,  
    So he forget himself.

“ I'm Tom the piper's son, and luck  
To any man, horse, pig, or duck  
    That has a nose for pelf.

Bring me aboard a fishing smack  
    And drop me on the Ram,

And I will tell the Zodiac  
    The very thing I am,  
    A babbler, a gabbler  
Of speeches meaningless,  
    A hero, a zero  
Of nothings, I confess.”

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“ A babbler and a luck-bringer !  
Many are worse than he, young Sir.  
    Go unto my son Giles.  
My ship's the *Centaur*, his the *Midge* ;  
She lies by yonder pier of the bridge,  
    Close to the mended piles.  
To him ! He'll be right glad to have  
    A Southron in the crew ;  
Though I'd not seek a fishy grave,  
    Had I a tongue like you,  
        But wander and squander  
    Fair hours in cities wet,  
        Appealing and squealing  
My woes to whom I met.

“ Stop, here's an angel ! He's a dolt  
That stays to thank. To Giles, you colt,  
    For the *Midge* sails ere noon.”  
And Ass ran straight as he could spell  
Unto the wicker coracle  
    Shaped like a sickle moon.  
The crew were three, a manatee  
    Prostrate upon the deck,  
A Frisian of low degree  
    With long unwashen neck,  
        The skipper, a dipper  
    Into pint pot and can,  
        Three only, not lonely,  
A match for any man.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

The manatee was dead almost,  
Never yet shown at an impost,  
    And breathed inert as peat.  
Skipper and mate in rolled-up vest  
Their skill unto its plight address,  
    Offering spirits neat.  
“Oho,” they roar, “here comes one more,  
    There’s barely room for one.  
Your wits restore on the bilge floor ;  
    We’ll see what can be done.”  
    The monster made one stir  
As new hand came aboard,  
    Then flopped tail and dropped tail  
And went unto the Lord.

“We have lost our pride !” the skipper cried,  
The Frisian no hope espied,  
    But could his own tongue speak.  
The beast was dead beyond a doubt,  
And lay there with a cold snout ;  
    It had been sick a week.  
But Ass was not so overbold  
As to promote a plan,  
But crept down humbly to the hold  
And waited like a man.  
    With stinking and clinking  
Around him and above,  
    He wondered and pondered  
On the harsh doom of love.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“Up now, thou bleeding nature !” came  
His captain’s call as welcome flame  
    Into a furnace tired.  
And he obeyed with springing bliss.  
“Speak, mate, what shall we do with this ?”  
    The skipper next enquired.  
“Meat enough here, though sorry cheer,”  
    Said Ass, “for month or more.”  
“Well spoken, fere ; thou art no bier,  
    Of blitheness hast a store.  
    Set sail now ! Turn tail now  
    Thou canst not ; art our fay  
    To light us and sprite us.”  
The coracle ’gan sway.

Fairer than Tiber is our Thames,  
When noontide’s water without wems  
    Glasses the well-caulked seam ;  
But fairer ne’er than on that hour  
When, in the plenitude of power,  
    A king glides adown stream.  
The sun was into Leo got  
    And every spire ice-clear,  
As the barge royal with flags hot  
    Floated from Westminster,  
    With levy and bevy  
Of seated damozels,  
    With yeomen and bowmen  
And fool in cap and bells.



## VOYAGE OF ASS

At Windsor was his pleasure held,  
For he would have a cloud dispelled  
    Of strife political ;  
And there the queen awaited him  
With minstrels on the blosmy brim  
    Who made each moment small.  
The blessed prince, the nation's targe,  
    Whither hopes like arrows fly,  
Stood by his father in the barge,  
    Reading from bestiary  
    Of natures whose statures  
Are strange to mortal sight,  
    Of tree-cat and sea-cat  
And camelopard bright.

The coracle with tide and swell  
And bright breeze blowing, as men tell,  
    Was bound for Chiswick Fair,  
And starting first from Southwark bank,  
Came even with the freight of rank,  
    Ere one was well aware.  
An earl peeped down and saw the thing  
    With overmantling ire,  
And to his sovereign liege the king  
    Whispered, " A monster, Sire,  
    A vanity ! " " Humanity ! "  
The prince cried with one look ;  
    " Spare stricture ; his picture  
Is in my precious book."

## VOYAGE OF ASS

Before a thing miraculous  
Even a king is curious  
    As cobblers with their awls.  
Swiftly the rowers are bid cease  
Their plashing measure, and " In peace  
    Approach," a herald calls.  
Then Giles and Ass in rival grasp  
    The monster's bulk uplift,  
And the court marvels with mute gasp,  
Till England silence rift.  
    Retiring admiring,  
With purses for their needs,  
    They steer fair for freer fair  
As the crowned craft proceeds.

O Chiswick sport is goodly sport,  
When mountebanks their limbs distort  
    And merry jigs are sung,  
And modest Joans have fortunes told  
By silver-tongued Egyptians bold,  
    And ribboned caps are flung.  
A monster's ever welcome there  
    Or live, or dead, or feigned,  
Where old Time's tugged by his last hair  
    And youth goes unrestrained  
    In proud round and loud round  
Of true and tireless mirth  
    On holiday and jolly day  
For all that love this earth.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

They moored her on the northern side  
At a convenient turn o' the tide,  
    And ran toward the noise,  
Leaving the Frisian to guard,  
Who was a sober man and hard,  
    Misliking giddy toys.  
The manatee they pushed in sack,  
    To be revealed full soon,  
And either bore it on his back,  
    Until the tripping boon  
        Of maidens in cadence  
Carried them on the green  
    To spring to and swing to  
A manly morris clean.

Then at a stall with juggler shared  
The people on that creature stared  
    Which Giles's father won  
From the high coast part of Cathay  
To furnish pelf for a long day  
    To ill-conditioned son.  
And when the hubbub muttered deep  
    And folk departed slow,  
They found their fellow fast asleep  
    With victuals at the prow.  
    They shake him and wake him,  
Put forth unto the town,  
    And enter its centre  
At the moon's going down.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

And when another day begun,  
They count their takings, and each one  
Admits to seven pound.  
But Ass gave up two-thirds of his share  
As prentice-money for the care  
That Giles toward him owned.  
And in regard of coming gain  
The manatee they lug  
To an apothecary of Spain  
His inside for to plug  
With spices, devices  
'Gainst time's corruptive art,  
Well grooving, removing  
Liver and guts and heart.

Now he, that lived in Lambeth, knew  
The name of every herb that grew  
On hillock, mead, or bower,  
And in what scale without mishap  
To powder stone and mingle sap  
For draught of eldritch power.  
And unto him resorted dames  
From distance and hard by  
To sate the hunger of the flames  
That yawned in lust's body  
With mallow and aloe  
And *lignum sanctum* raspt,  
Germander, coriander  
In leaf of laurel claspt.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

And he could rule the skiey zones  
Houses and declinations  
    By craft astrologick,  
Being withal a sectary  
Of Almagest and Ptolemy,  
    And figures well could prick ;  
In urines he had skill also,  
    Closed up in limbecks lithe,  
And might a poultice brew of dough  
    To make old Pelias writhe.  
    Ne'er Satan turned at an  
Ill deed but he took odds,  
    From coffer he'd offer  
Babes to his country's gods.

He sate beneath a crocodile,  
And crimped his brows in friendless guile  
    At thought of parting trade ;  
For he had lost a journeyman,  
Gone to attend the Lady Anne,  
    Or to be better paid.  
But when the glance fell upon Ass,  
    It spelt, " That stripling's mine ;  
His features are a polished glass  
    Where women's graces shine :  
    They sue there and view there  
The glow that is their own ;  
    Be he here, they'll be here  
In legions, by Mahoun."

## VOYAGE OF ASS

It was not hard to stuff the beast  
At no price to obtain a priest  
    For that accursed shop ;  
And Ass was not discomfited  
At promise of a roof to's head,  
    Albeit at the top  
Over the swallows and the drip.  
    He rejoiced verament,  
But held one finger at his lip  
    Like Silence, in ring pent,  
        Demuring, enduring  
The siege of usage cruel,  
    Still cleaving ungrieving  
To wearer of the jewel.

O pastoral fidelity,  
That guard'st from taloned destiny  
    The green-leaved heart of youth,  
How little is thy lore acknown !  
Since man perverse, like dog with bone,  
    Gnaws on the meat-bare truth  
That fate is fate whate'er befall ;  
    So love and fate join hands,  
And what is done for good and all  
    Is best, though ill it stands.  
    But fate's bond is hate's bond,  
Dissevered in faith's wars,  
    And true love is new love,  
Beyond the ancient stars.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

Now Alison, whose husband's crown  
Lay propt on pillows of swan's down  
With nostrils hardly seen,

Took counsel with his cousins twain  
How they might get their Ass again ;

“ He is not far, I ween.”

And they accorded willingly,  
By pastime thereto spurred

And scorn of the indignity  
Whereby their coz was slurred.

“ We'll seek him and speak him  
Fair of ourselves and you ” ;

For truth was the youth was  
In their sweet fancies too.

“ He hath not left the city, sure,  
For here's his only cote-armure,  
Yon poke and cloak of sow.

Though needing them, he makes no suit,  
So jealous of your good repute ;  
He's nice, we both allow.

Why not command that these be cried  
At bounds and market-place ?

To claim what are but his, that pride  
He'll certainly abase.

Be wary, and chary,  
For the world's censure's hard ;

They found them who impound them,  
Thrown in your goodman's yard.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“ And let it go forth that 'tis he  
Desires to yield them back in free  
    Transfer of goods retained.  
By such means in a week you'll find  
The darling vision of your mind  
    Before the sick one's saned.”  
Said Alison, “ Ye well devise,”  
    And straightway set her down  
To write a libel of the prize  
    To be cried through the town.  
    “ Go coz, band my husband  
More straitly round the head ;  
    There's no cure but slow cure,  
So let him be well bled.”

The mercer knew his helpless plight,  
And that he was not a delight  
    To her he had not trusted ;  
And as he groaned between his bands,  
Constricted by most duteous hands,  
    For a new love he lusted.  
And when the chamber empty was,  
    He called through bared teeth  
To one that scoured the lamp of brass  
    In the great hall beneath,  
    “ Quick, Jankin, a can'kin,  
For Goddes own sweet sake !  
    I'm dying, here lying,  
O, and my heart will break.”



## VOYAGE OF ASS

Although the ladies made essay  
To turn the servant's ear away,  
    For them he was too fast,  
And brought his master his desire,  
Thus adding fuel to the fire  
    Which did that lecher brast ;  
Who swore that he would be revenged  
    On wife and cousins both,  
Since they his nape had squarely singed,  
    And now were nothing loth  
    To bleed him and feed him  
    On poisonous sweetmeats,  
    To prick him and stick him  
With knives under the sheets.

And he bade Jankin lock the door,  
And help him stand upon the floor,  
    For head alone was weak,  
And loose the fetters round his crown,  
And robe him in his richest gown  
    With cloth of gold at peak.  
And in his hosen and his boots  
    And hat with broadened girth  
He seemed a tree torn up by roots,  
    Yet upright on the earth.  
    His sword's length a board's length  
From girdle grandly swung ;  
    Scarce walked he, yet talked he  
As bull's throat he had wrung.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

And Jankin saw him down the stair  
With aidful arm and guiding care  
    That none might hear them go,  
And out of the dark postern gate,  
Still holding plastered head elate  
    Aching with mickle woe.  
But he forbade him further come,  
    And sent him back with lie  
That he was gone to buy a drum  
    To beat him to the sky  
    Deceasing, increasing  
Her wealth at her desire ;  
    And Jankin well drank in  
The news, like a true squire.

To where the bickering watermen  
Toss for each passenger past ten  
    He picked his fate-marked path,  
Crossing the river at Savoy,  
On further bank to taste his joy  
    Or his joy's aftermath.  
And at a tavern by a field  
    With singers round the door  
He showed his crown's nine-plated shield  
    And called for wine and more :  
    " O bring me, O wing me  
A leman to my love,  
    O sing me, O ring me  
A carol from above ! "

## VOYAGE OF ASS

He lacked not love, he lacked not song,  
He lacked not pints severe and long,  
    He lacked not anything ;  
But he was not content with that,  
For when the fire gets round the fat,  
    The devils in hell sing.  
He swore and rolled, the table trolled  
    Measures man may not write,  
The hostess old and tapster scold,  
Saying, " Midnight's not night."  
    The gay star the day-star  
Came out and in again,  
    He sate there and ate there,  
Making his pleasure pain.

Still swilling in the sun's red eye,  
He marked a peacock butterfly  
    Poised on a lowly dock,  
And cried, " Lo, here Beelzebub  
Acome to fetch away my jub  
    In likeness of a cock ! "  
And rising without other word  
    That enemy to beat,  
And drawing to its length that sword,  
Unsteady on his feet,  
    He stumbled and tumbled  
And struck a clothyard wide,  
    To step on his weapon  
That pierced his guardless side.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

And there in agony he roared,  
Calling the butterfly his Lord,  
    Whom he had sought to slay.  
Unsatchelled children strolling by  
Fled from the portent with a cry  
    That marred their present play.  
The hostess trundled from the inn  
    With single serving wench,  
Redoubling the disgraceful din,  
    To lay him on a bench ;  
    And hither and thither  
Like a scared hen she ran :  
    “ A surgeon, a chirurgeon  
    To help this wounded man ! ”

Bad folk are tended at their deaths,  
And render unto Christ their breaths  
    With proper service done ;  
Of every ten good at most nine  
Must be their own absolving shrine,  
    When they die they've but One.  
The mercer in that lewd pothouse  
    Had priest and cooling draught ;  
Forgotten was the late carouse,  
    And no man gibed or laughed.  
    His eye strayed, his sigh strayed  
And once he spoke a name ;  
    His bold hand was cold hand  
Ere any surgeon came.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

For the apothecary, whose bin  
Was but a stone's throw from that inn,  
    Stung by the outcry dire,  
Had sent his prentice forth to hear  
If any man was murdered near,  
    Or any house afire.  
And Ass came back with the report  
    That a rich man was stabbed  
Mortally by his sword in sport,  
And that his head was jabbed :  
    " He drank there and sank there  
Companionless till noon,  
    Exclaiming and flaming  
With ardour for the moon ! "

" Zany ! And hast not seen the corse ? "

" There was too great a press ; perforce  
    I elbowed to the door,  
Which bolted was." " Go forth again ;  
If any man be said for slain,  
    We have a cure therefor.  
Bear these two bottles in thy hand  
    (Then will they let thee in),  
And say the greatest leech i' the land  
    Is coming for to win  
    Where t'other made pother  
Of a straightforward case :  
    I'll follow ; they'll swallow  
That word, but wear bold face."

## VOYAGE OF ASS

And Ass obeyed, and saw the man  
From whom his bitterness began  
    Calm as a sleeping child.  
The stubborn chin none could mistake,  
The eyes that would to pardon wake  
    Were shut, not reconciled.  
The cloth of gold was torn in parts  
    By greedy toppers' clutch,  
Of coin in pockets through their arts  
    There was not 'overmuch.  
    A pale wife, the alewife  
Was lighting candle-wicks,  
    The priesthood in creased hood  
Held up a crucifix.

The apothecary came full soon.  
And said they should have sent at noon,  
    When the sword-thrust was raw ;  
He might have remedied the ill,  
The gentleman had sanguine will,  
    That from his palm he saw.  
He asked his name ; they could not say,  
    Only that he would come  
By water on a Saturday  
    To sport with all and some.  
    The muster and cluster  
Grew turbulent and dry,  
    Which seeing, Ass, fleeing,  
Escaped his chieftain's eye.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

His lady shall her freedom learn ;  
He will not to the shop return,  
    But walk toward the bridge  
Along the shambled riverside,  
And where the watercress is cried,  
    And past the stagnant *Midge*.  
“ There goes the fairy that we lost !  
    Hast left the wizard too ? ”  
“ Of grievous tidings I am post,  
    But they are not for you.  
    Christ bless you and press you  
To His most loving arms,  
    And guide you and tide you  
Safe from the sword's alarms.”

But when he reached the Elephant  
(Whose sign, like banner in Romaunt,  
    Crested the sea of folk),  
He heard “ Oyez, oyez, oyez,  
If he that did of late possess  
    One poke and sowskin cloak  
Desires to have them free again  
    Even as they were found  
Withouten penalty or pain,  
    Returning safe and sound——”  
    No further, though murder  
Awaited him that day,  
    He listened, but glistened  
With sweat and ate the way.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

He knocked upon the mercer's gate,  
And Jankin opened it with pate  
    Balder than any coot.  
For in his sleep the ambushed queen  
With razor-blade had shaved it clean,  
    And painted it to boot,  
Because of his foul treachery  
    Letting her husband 'scape,  
Since women, when their bile runs high,  
    Will make a knave an ape.  
    " My poke, man, my cloak, man !  
I left them at this house.  
    With bad news and glad news  
In team I come, thou louse."

    " And you have news, Sir, of my lord ?  
He left us of his own accord  
    Yestreen, not yet returned."  
" Your lord is cold as iron nail,  
With no more freshness in his tail  
    Than butter that you churned."  
" O what will my poor mistress say ?  
    But it may not be true."  
" She'll preen her plumes for holiday.  
I saw him close as you,  
    Unmoving, unloving,  
With leech and priest supplied,  
    With nose stiff and toes stiff  
And a great hole in's side."



## VOYAGE OF ASS

Ill tidings are best told with pounce  
And no corollary or flounce  
    To hide their hint of graves ;  
For when despair has quickly won,  
Comfort peers forth in orison  
    Like dawn from hopeless waves.  
The page, astonied, witless took  
    The stairway at a bound,  
And meeting Alison at book,  
    Wawled out " He's dead and found !  
    Our stranger the ranger  
    Waits for his property ;  
    He fought me, he taught me  
    News of our tragedy."

" And would you let a stranger wait  
Like servingman of low estate ?  
    Quick, bring him ! Shame on you !  
And, keeping napkin at your eye,  
Go down into the buttery  
    And tell the ladies too."  
So Jankin went as he was bid,  
    And brought them face to face.  
" I slew him not," quoth Ass ; " he did  
    That action of his grace ;  
    All will-less and skill-less  
    The rich man has his end.  
    O heaven hath driven  
    The lover to the friend ! "

## VOYAGE OF ASS

And then he told the woe succinct,  
But only once she changed her tinct,  
    When he described that inn ;  
For he was wiser than to spare  
Relation of the sorry care  
    That crowned her husband's sin.  
The cousins came ere he had done  
    And wound her in their clasp,  
Who swooned not, nor unloosed her sun-  
    Red tresses from jet hasp ;  
    And white-faced yet bright-faced  
They say, " Let him remain  
    Till our kin and your kin  
Have visited the slain."

Two brothers of the mercer went  
To view their house's detriment  
    At Lambeth on that day,  
And find him honest burial  
(It was the best that could befall)  
    In deep-dug graveyard clay ;  
At whose decision clearly made  
    Must Ass abide a guest,  
Since he a friendly part had played,  
    As everyone confest,  
    Not sinning, but winning  
Love of an honest dame,  
    Aspirant, no tyrant,  
And meriting the same.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

And he, ere many years had gone,  
Set up a monument of stone  
    In chancel of that church,  
Whereon the mercer's form was carved  
More fairly than the man deserved,  
    Whose virtues were to search.  
His peaked shoon rest upon a dog,  
    And round his neck hangs chain,  
Beneath is scrolled a catalogue  
    (In Latin greened with stain)  
    By kindness and blindness  
Of kindred duteous  
    Well written, unsmitten  
By sunshine luminous.

The moon swims unto Harrow Hill,  
And silvered archers go to kill  
    Wild conies on the crown ;  
The evening damps from meads arise,  
And cattle raise their sluggish eyes  
    On glow-wormed Horsendon ;  
The belfry's dumb at Perivale,  
    And Brentford's tombed in trees ;  
Two parents rather laugh than wail  
    On a small knoll 'twixt these ;  
    " Three lights gone, three nights gone  
Without our shepherd son ! "  
    " I warrant, the arrant  
Fool has a fortune won."

## VOYAGE OF ASS

“ Why was he not at Hampstead born ?  
For there the cold air is as corn  
To feed a puny soul.”

“ Nay, Highgate’s higher, on my oath !  
And if a boy were born at both,  
Then happy were his dole.”

“ But here hemmed in by hill and stream  
What chance hath one of wit ?  
Money was never made by dream,  
Though telling dream makes it.”

“ His folly is wholly  
His buckler ’gainst the fiend ;  
’Twill save him, we’ll have him ;  
His dirge shall not be keened.”

Trust gives good sleep to man and wife,  
And they win life who trust in life,  
An ignorant once said.

(And when one asked him how he failed,  
Answered he had not rightly sailed,  
He trusted in the dead.)

The three days’ voyage of the youth  
Is nigh accomplished now ;

The sweets of love are in his tooth,  
He hath his cloak of sow,

His apples ; he grapples  
With poke ; no more delay.

His home calls, his loam calls,  
He can no longer stay.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

But on the fourth day, as they stir  
From meridian cheese, a messenger  
    Before the cot upstarts,  
Bearing a letter in his hand,  
Whereby the proud ones understand  
    Their Ass hath broke two hearts,  
And with their pleasure takes to wed  
    A mercer's widow fair,  
Who welcomes them to board and bread,  
    If they will follow there.  
    So, stocking and locking  
    Their wealth where none may find,  
    They rank in with Jankin,  
And leave the knoll behind.

O what a merry meeting 'twas,  
Though not upon the bladed grass  
    With tinkling sheep around,  
Nor in a leafy labyrinth,  
Dappled with purple hyacinth,  
    Scenting the scented ground ;  
Nay, nor in farmhouse musical  
    With log and frying-pan,  
Nor by a strawy manger stall,  
    As the world's bliss began,  
    But under that wonder  
Of wealth and craftsman's skill,  
    The domed roof, the gnomed roof,  
Where love hath won his will !

## VOYAGE OF ASS

They marvelled at her gay attire,  
Though black it was and shone as fire,  
    They marvelled at her hair ;  
But most at her benignity,  
Which seemed to need a loving eye  
    To gaze on youth so fair.  
She told them how she loved their son,  
    Whom she had loved three days,  
And how, while blood through her did run,  
    She loved him in all ways,  
        In singing and springing  
Of sparrows through the square,  
        In leaping and weeping  
Of raindrops from the air.

And for to pay him due respect  
Whom she had lost, they would reject  
    An instant marriage bond.  
Brothers and cousins bade ensue it,  
But Ass advised her they would rue it,  
    Of faith he was so fond.  
But when 'twas seen that two alone  
    Urged that unhappiness,  
And that their scruple was a stone  
    Of honest self-distress,  
        They yielded, and wielded  
Perpetual yoked steeds  
    In chariot Iscariot  
Of treachery that succeeds.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

The day is come, and Venus' doves  
With all the little shimmering loves

Are volant through the sky.

The folk that harbour in the house

Array themselves most glorious

For the solemnity.

The ancient pair green buskins wear,

And Jankin's locks have grown,

The cousins bear great combs in hair

And sleeves of perse-saffron ;

Each brother must smother

His breast with silver lace ;

An awning sheds dawning

On the outside o' the place.

The skipper of the *Midge* attends

With the sea-captain and his friends,

The Frisian's neck is clean.

The little child that saw the mayor

Ye may be certain he is there,

Though he may not be seen.

The apple-man has quit his scales,

But the apothecary,

His presence 'tis, blest hap, that fails ;

For he must shortly die.

(He pleads not and heeds not

The voice of magistrate ;

In dungeon men plunge on

His chest the iron weight.)

## VOYAGE OF ASS

But when they came to sign the book,  
The quill in bridegroom's fingers shook,  
For he had but one name :  
His parents, dropping with the heat,  
Were sejant on a transept seat ;  
Ah, he has lost the game !  
" O what did the priest christen me ? "  
And his bride's voice indites,  
" 'Twas Nicholas, thou sprig of glee ! "  
*Nicholas Asshe* he writes.  
And laughter came after  
That stroke of subtle sense ;  
A rude name, a crude name  
Needs changing by pretence.

(Now had their banns been read, this mere  
Device were void ; but then not clear  
The parties' names in speech :  
" Our brother and our sister " were  
The terms by clergy used there,  
Few witnesses impeach.)  
Upon the feast that followed was  
A goodly anthem sung ;  
Of amethyst and chrysopras  
The thuribles that swung.  
'Gainst peril a beryl  
Was given to each guest ;  
The banqueting and junketing  
Exceeded poet's zest.



## VOYAGE OF ASS

And she gave him the truest love  
That ever dove gave unto dove,  
    And boy and girl beside,  
Who grew up to be good and brave,  
Behaving as the flowers behave,  
    Whose eyes are open wide ;  
And he gave her the purest trust  
    That woman from man got,  
Namely, to guard repute from rust,  
    And be as 'twere a pot  
        Absorbing, inorbing  
Moisture and earth with care,  
    To render a slender  
Lily to holy air.

So Master Asshe and Alison  
Lived long exalted in that town  
    For mutual blessedness ;  
Their cousins wedded worthy men  
Who loved them and were loved again,  
    Nor grew devotion less ;  
The elder folk on Richmond Hill  
    Had a new farm bestowed,  
And many fleeces by their skill  
    To their son's warehouse flowed.  
    In gladness and sadness  
And meek industrious pride  
    All flourished, well nourished  
And famous far and wide.

## VOYAGE OF ASS

Now hearken ye that asses be,  
In England, France, and Germany,  
    For now the tale is told.  
The moral is that fairest bliss,  
That bringeth man to Mary's kiss,  
    Cometh from love, not gold.  
My art is weak, I cannot speak  
    But in a stuttering tongue ;  
Spare faults to seek, and grant I gleek  
    Beloved of old and young,  
        That royal youth and loyal youth  
My pages may confirm,  
    And cheer me and rear me,  
When I am with the worm.

And thou that reign'st supreme o'er all,  
O publisher of tractates tall,  
    Who buy'st what thou canst sell,  
I do beseech thee of thy grace,  
If thou dost ever show thy face  
    Under my citadel,  
To bear with thee an ass's nole,  
    Well drawn over the ears,  
That thou may'st thence betake thee whole  
    When ass's rage appears.  
    To Spirit of Merit  
My book I do commend ;  
    Sweet Jesu still ease you,  
And here I make an end.

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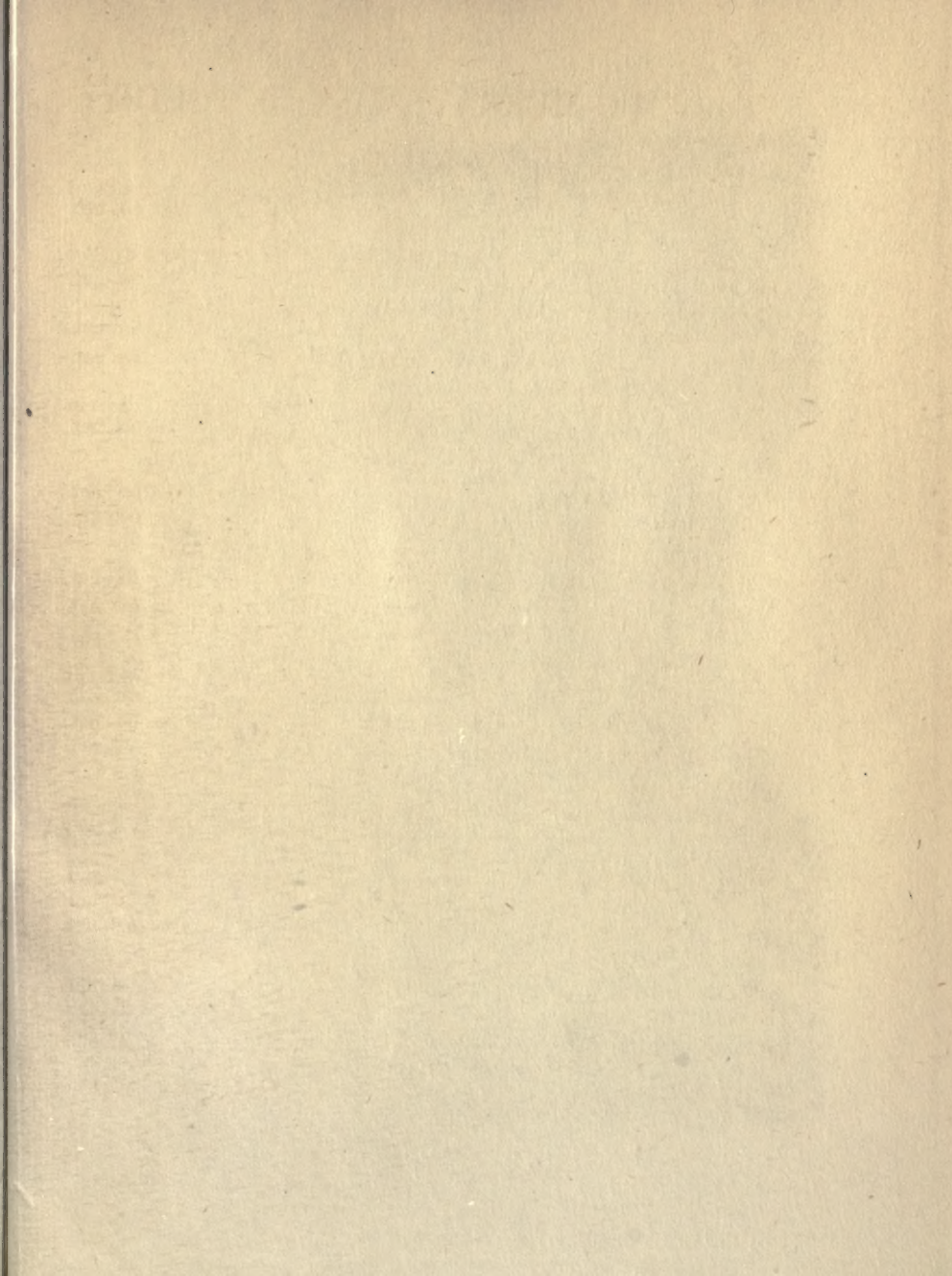
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